
The Team Leader's Principles of Tactical Movement

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Regardless of a unit's size, formation, or movement technique, its team leaders are the single most vital key to its successful tactical movement.

The deliberate attack at the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) offers an example. Units training there often display a marked difference in tactical field discipline between the time they cross the line of departure and the time they make decisive contact. During the deliberate attack, the units with fire teams that are proficient in moving tactically are more likely to finish their movement and complete the mission.

Sometimes, units performing

these missions fail because of a lapse in security, stealth, dispersion, or control. Little clusters of tired soldiers become less inclined to step off the trail during

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halts and rest. Soldiers become more inclined to speak aloud across the formation or to doze in place as the man ahead picks up and moves out. Separated from their elements in the dark, disoriented soldiers wander about in the

formation. In the pre-dawn hours, lying down on rucksacks becomes contagious.

These problems usually are not caused by soldiers who are totally ignorant of proper tactical movement principles but by leaders who fail to enforce those principles. Units that allow this to occur risk detection and sudden enemy contact, disproportionate casualties from indirect fire and mines, and breaks in formation from which they never recover. Units need team leaders who know how to fix the little problems before they can become big ones.

Fundamentally, the same tactical movement principles that may apply to a

large unit also apply to that unit's fire teams. These principles in turn define the actions a team leader must take to conduct the proper tactical movement of his fire team while part of a larger force:

Security

While moving, soldiers can see—and be observed by—their team leader, and he makes sure they maintain a heads-up posture and watch their sectors of observation. During halts, soldiers follow the team leader's example and kneel to rest; or he may put them in the prone position. At long halts, he assigns their sectors of fire. He is responsible for his team's sector and is always thinking 360-degree observation. The team leader checks soldiers for alertness and ensures that they use night vision devices during darkness. He constantly checks camouflage.

A team leader who learns and enforces security provides maximum protection for his element, and this develops the habit of considering firepower in anticipation of enemy contact.

Stealth

The team leader has conducted a "jump check" during his pre-combat inspection to detect noisy equipment, and during movement, he ruthlessly enforces both noise and light discipline and quickly corrects any violation. He sets the stealth example by using proper hand-and-arm signals and night walking techniques to control the unit while on the march.

The team leader learns that a unit in which the soldiers maintain good operational security can exploit concealment, visibility, and enemy weakness. He also learns that a unit using poor operational security can attract the unwanted attention of enemy forward observers and be ambushed or come under indirect fire before they ever see the objective.

Dispersion

The team leader considers terrain, vegetation, visibility, and speed of movement to determine the proper interval between team members. Soldiers tend to bunch together at night,



even when illumination is adequate. On the other hand, too much space between soldiers can lead to a break in contact.

The team leader must learn to achieve maximum dispersion without losing either control or momentum. He must also consider the consequences and his reaction of the unit's being engaged at any time.

Control

Besides leading from the front, a team leader's function is to help the squad leader maintain security and control, and element control begins long before the mission does. The team leader cannot control his team unless they understand the purpose and types of control measures, particularly as stressed in battle drills and unit standing operating procedures. He is better able to control the team when they are familiar with the mission and have rehearsed their part in it until they are thoroughly confident.

During movement, the team leader applies positive control to his troops to enforce security, stealth, and dispersion. He takes action to prevent breaks in contact. He checks personnel during halts, and this is one of his most critical contributions to the unit. The team leader is the individual soldier's direct link to the will of the commander. If he does not check his people, most

likely nobody will, and the result is often a JRTC deliberate attack "movement to daylight" scenario, in which a unit becomes disoriented, misses the objective, and wanders around until sunup.

For team leaders who are skilled in the tactics and control measures of their units, executing these principles becomes an automatic response. As role models and teachers, they pass these habits on to the junior soldiers.

The most successful infantry team leaders tend to have an aggressive leadership style, while at the same time projecting a positive attitude and leading by example. A commander whose unit is having trouble with the nuts and bolts of tactical movement should make a sustained and vigorous effort to cultivate and reinforce these attributes in his young leaders. And a unit that has many of these team leaders is more likely to survive a tactical movement and accomplish its mission right the first time.

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